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April 5, 2002

Chiefs celebrate 109th anniversary

CPOs from local commands gather to honor history

JOCS (SW) Darrell Ames
CINCPACFLT Public Affairs

The crowd of close to 600, attending the 109th birthday celebration for Navy chief petty officers, appeared to swell and glow with pride at each passing moment. But it wasn't until the retired members of their august fraternity approached the podium at the Hickam Air Force Base Officers' Club that the glorious past merged with the challenging present.

"I'm proud to be a chief petty officer in the United States Navy," said retired Chief Boatswain's Mate, Harold B. Estes. "My first chief in 1934 didn't waste any time squaring us away, but we were always able to turn to him if we had a problem," he added.

As active and retired chiefs gathered worldwide, the levels of pride and tradition at the festival held at the Hickam Officers Club, would have been

▼ See **CHIEFS**, A-3



JOC Gerard Sekerak photo
Retired Navy lieutenant and former chief John Finn (left), Medal of Honor recipient, raises his glass for a toast with COMNAVRECONFOPAC Command Master Chief Mo Radke at the Navy Chiefs 109th birthday celebration March 30.

Oldest Medal of Honor recipient speaks at ceremony

Karen S. Spangler
Assistant Editor

At age 93, John Finn is the oldest living Medal of Honor winner from any war and the last surviving Medal of Honor winner from Dec. 7, 1941. But the well-acclaimed hero staunchly downplays his role in the Dec. 7 attack.

"I've never said that I shot down anything, but I've been credited with shooting down the whole Japanese fleet," he joked.

Finn, who was in Hawaii last weekend and the keynote speaker for the 109th birthday ball of the Navy Chief Petty Officers, doesn't really like to talk about his role in the war. He was a chief petty officer ordnance man assigned to Naval Air Station at Kaneohe on the day of the attack and was later awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions.

But to hear him tell it: "I didn't have enough sense to come in out of the rain. The Japanese came in early in the morning, kicked the hell out of us and left. That's the whole story," he explained humbly.

Awakened on that Sunday morning to the sound of airplanes flying overhead, Finn related, "I was lying in bed in my beautiful new quarters with my beautiful blonde wife and I said, 'It's Sunday. Who's flying those planes?'" Soon after, he received a message to go to the air station in Kaneohe - driving the short distance at a sedate 20 mph pace. As he neared the installation, he saw that the base was under attack and pushed the car into full throttle on a race to the airplane hangars.

"I saw the red meatballs on the bottom of the wings of the planes that were flying," he recalled.

Finn, who pulled a .50 caliber machine gun into an open area and proceeded to launch his own attack while the air hangar behind him burned, was in plain sight of enemy diving planes as he began to fire. He didn't stop firing until the last plane left.

"I was all charged up," he recounted. "I was mad!" Sadness in his voice, he remembered, "It was terrible - the loss of life, the loss of property."

When the battle was over, Finn was badly injured and bloody - with at least 21 shrapnel wounds. He had lost the use of his left arm and could barely walk, but Finn felt there was still work to be done. Instead of reporting to the aid station, he pulled fragments of shrapnel from his chest and returned to the air station to supervise the rearming of planes. It was the next day when he finally went to the hospital where he remained until Christmas Eve.

The rest is history. For his heroism, Finn was presented with the Medal of Honor by

▼ See **FINN**, A-2



John Finn

Construction on 'The Mall' progresses

Dawn Cross

Navy Exchange Hawaii

Customers can expect more with their Exchange benefit at the new Mall at Pearl Harbor. "Our goal is to identify new opportunities in merchandise for our customers," said Mike Cottrell, District Manager/General Manager. "Not just expand our current merchandise."

To find out what customers want, the NEX held focus groups last November and December and invited single Sailors, officers and enlisted and their spouses, retirees and teenagers.

"We asked them what they would like to see in the new store," said Jennifer Jerauld, NEX Customer Relations Assistant, said. "We asked them if name brands were important to them or quality and price points."

From the focus groups, we learned that the Exchange isn't offering the middle price in many areas, Jerauld said.

"The new store was designed using focus groups," she said. "Focus groups are effective for getting our customers' wishes to the right people for action."

After the information is gathered from the focus groups and customer suggestions, it's submitted to our buyers at NEXCOM, NEX Headquarters, in Virginia Beach, Cottrell said. Besides merchandise selection, customers will notice a change in how the merchandise is presented.

"The added space will allow us to separate merchandise for display instead of jamming it into racks," Sparks said.

The number of clothing racks will also increase. Another area where customers will appreciate the extra space is the electronics department.

"This area will be huge, almost three times bigger than our current areas," Sparks said. "TVs and computers will be displayed better and movies and CDs will be located within this department."

The new Mall will also boast a bigger food court that features more seating inside the store as well as seating in the outside lanai area on the second floor. New to the food court are Popeye's and Sbarro.

Many space limitations the store has now will be solved with the opening of the new store. However, parking will still be an issue for customers. As construction continues, parking at the NEX will be impacted until spring 2003.

"After that, the Mall will have over 1,600 spaces to offer customers," Sparks said. "The most we've been able to offer customers is almost 900."

The current Exchange will continue operating as usual up until the opening of the new Mall, late this fall.

"We want our customers to be assured that our shelves will be stocked and the merchandise they need is available," Cottrell said. "The Navy Exchange has been working hard to reduce the impact construction has had on our business and customers."

The current NEX building was constructed in 1972 and even then, it was undersize, Cottrell said. As time passed, the NEX expanded.

Services like the barber and beauty shops and laundry were added in 1989. The last store renovation occurred in 1996.

USS Hopper deploys



JOC Gerard Sekerak photo
USS Hopper (DDG 70) departs Pearl Harbor on deployment Tuesday. During its deployment, Hopper and its crew will support Operation Enduring Freedom. See related story and photos on A-5.

Joint service effort cleans up ordnance on Palmyra

JOC Gerard Sekerak
Managing Editor

The residents of Palmyra Atoll now have a safer place to live and work thanks to the Navy, Army and Coast Guard. The three services teamed up to dispose of unexploded ordnance during a recent trip to the atoll.

Since the job was technically within the purview of the Army, Navy Explosive Ordnance Disposal Mobile Unit Three (EODMU 3) Detachment Middle Pacific (MIDPAC) extended an invitation to the Army EOD detachment at Schofield Barracks to send two technicians to join with two Navy EOD technicians.

Personnel from the two units teamed up to dispose of the explosive contents of

a World War II-era storage magazine on Cooper Island, located approximately 950 miles south of Oahu.

Over the past 60 years, storm surges had caused significant amounts of sea water to wash into the magazine, causing the ordnance items stored inside to corrode to a point where ordnance casings had disintegrated until all that was left was raw explosive.

In addition, employees of The Nature Conservancy - Palmyra residents and the group that has administrative control of the atoll - had located seven unarmed training land mines in the course of clearing trails on nearby Barren Island and asked that they also be destroyed.

▼ See **PALMYRA**, A-4



Photo courtesy of EODMU 3
The joint service team from the Navy, Army, and Coast Guard clean up burn residue from a storage magazine March 18 on Palmyra Island.